



**Testimony in Support of Funding of the Connecticut Voting Rights Act and Equitable  
Early Voting in House Bill 6659, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium  
Ending June 30, 2025, and Making Appropriations Thereafter**

**February 16, 2023**

Good evening, Co-Chairs Osten and Walker, Vice Chairs Hartley, Exum and Paris, and all distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Isabelle C. Muhlbauer, and I am the Voting Rights Advocacy Coordinator at LatinoJustice PRLDEF. LatinoJustice is a Latinx civil rights organization that fights to create a more just society by using and challenging the rule of law to secure transformative, equitable and accessible justice, by empowering our community and by fostering leadership through advocacy and education. I am writing to testify in support of Raised HB No. 6659 – specifically to ensure that the Secretary of the State (SOTS) is allocated the needed \$1.95 million dollars in the Biennium to implement the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of Connecticut (CTVRA).

The CTVRA will strengthen democracy in Connecticut by ensuring all voters in Connecticut have equal access to the ballot box. Unfortunately, voting rights are under attack across the country in ways that disproportionately impact black and brown voters. Court decisions have stripped away many of the protections in the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 leaving communities of black and brown voters vulnerable to voter suppression and discrimination. Connecticut is no exception to such practices, and it is why it is crucial for the legislature to fully fund and timely enact this legislation. The passage of the CTVRA will ensure that by doing so, Connecticut can be a leader in revitalizing democracy in America.



The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of Connecticut is supported by a strong coalition of racial justice and civil rights organizations and was introduced this year in the Elections Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly's 2023 Regular Session. The bill establishes a "preclearance" provision that requires local governments with a history of discrimination to get approval *before* they make certain voting changes. This will ensure localities are prevented from enacting policies or practices which have the effect of infringing upon or diluting the vote of Black and Brown communities. The CTVRA will provide voters with broader and stronger protections against harassment and intimidation and provide advocates with new legal tools to fight discriminatory voting practices in court. The bill will also create a central hub for election data and demographic information that will empower officials and community members to ensure accessible elections.

LatinoJustice has a long history of advocating for the expansion of language access rights to ensure the Latinx community has equal access to the ballot box and so we are particularly excited about the language assistance provisions in the CTVRA that extend beyond the federal VRA and will make it easier for voters with Limited English Proficiency to vote. Ballots can be complex and confusing even to those who are proficient in English. According to the most recent census data, more than 275,000 Connecticut residents statewide have limited English proficiency. It is critically important that Connecticut meet the needs of Limited English Proficiency voters, including immigrants and indigenous communities. Connecticut stands to be a leader along with several states that have expanded their laws to have lower population requirements to trigger language translation, making language assistance more expansive. Every voter deserves to have their voice heard, regardless of their English proficiency.



For the reasons outlined above, we ask that this body fully fund the CTVRA by allocating **\$1.95 million** to the SOTS for the two-year budget cycle. This is a small and reasonable ask, as it represents a small percentage of the \$50.5 billion proposed budget. It is an invaluable investment in protecting democracy in the state of Connecticut.

Thank you for your time.